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149th Anniversary

OF

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY.

WM. H. TENNEY, West Washington.



ADDRESS
OF
WILLIAM H. TENNEY.



ADDRESS
OF
WILLIAM H. TENNEY,
ON THE
149th Anniversary
OF
WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY,
DELIVERED FEBRUARY 23, 1881,
BEFORE THE
Oldest Inhabitants Association of Washington, D. C.,
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ADDRESS.

Mr. President and Members of the Oldest Inhabitants Association :

I feel flattered at being selected by you to deliver the annual address of the 22d of February. Although accustomed to debate from early manhood, I have never before attempted to deliver a formal address, and doubt my ability. I would have preferred that some other person had been your choice, but feel that it is a duty to comply with your wishes. Should I not be successful you will have to regret your partiality and overestimate of my qualifications.

We have met to-day to commemorate the birthday of the Father of his country.

Washington needs no eulogy. His memory and his services are embalmed in our hearts; yet a brief repetition of his virtues so familiar to you all may not be amiss. It is well to allude to them to rekindle the fires of patriotism which should burn in our hearts.

Washington was not the greatest man that ever lived, but he combined the rare qualities of greatness with goodness, and in that union he excelled Alexander, Caesar, or Napoleon. Unlike the first, he did not sigh for more worlds to conquer; and unlike the latter two, he could not be tempted to destroy the liberties of the country he had fought to attain. Washington's simple

and unaffected manners, his refusal of any other compensation for his services than his actual expenses; his resigning his commission when the war was closed, and returning, like another Cincinnatus, to the pursuit of agriculture; his positive refusal, after he had again consented to serve his country, to receive more than two terms of the Presidency, thus establishing that unwritten law of the Constitution, which is as precious to the hearts of the American people as the wisest of its provisions, are sacrifices unparalleled in the history of mankind.

Washington's farewell address, a priceless legacy, which you have just heard read, shows that though childless himself, in the largeness of his heart he adopted a whole nation as his children. I would strongly impress upon your minds that portion of his address in which he solemnly warns the people "against geographical discriminations, which would form parties that would disturb our Union—Northern and Southern, Atlantic and Western." In these sectional parties his prophetic vision foresaw that late and great civil war, which is now so auspiciously closed, with a Union remaining intact. African slavery, one of the great disturbing elements in the formation of the Constitution, was a compromise with other agreements that the importation of slaves should not be prohibited by Congress prior to the year 1808. As soon as Congress could pass a bill prohibiting the importation of slaves, that bill was enacted. It met with no factious opposition from Southern members in either house. That act met the approval of a President a native of Virginia.

Slavery, a legacy from the mother country, was a source of great anxiety to the patriots of the revolution both North and South. The illustrious Washington did not approve of it, and by will emancipated his slaves. Jefferson pronounced it a curse, and predicted that it would call down the vengeance of the Supreme Being. If slavery was a sin, the North and the South were equally guilty. At the adoption of the Constitution, twelve out of the thirteen States were slave States. The North was essentially commercial, the South agricultural; the North imported the slaves, which were sold to the South. The North, finding slave labor unprofitable, gradually abolished slavery. The South, by the invention of the cotton-gin, found the culture of cotton very profitable, and slave labor the cheapest, and in time honestly believed that slavery was a divine institution. The North, finding slave labor did not pay, and the laws of the country forbidding further importation of slaves, came to the conclusion that slavery was a great moral wrong, so much does pecuniary interest unintentionally influence the best balanced minds and the most honest judgments. In the course of time the revolutionary heroes passed away. "Generation succeeded generation, but the Lord abideth forever." A new generation arose who "knew not Joseph," and forgetting the compacts of the Constitution, and forgetting the common brotherhood of the revolution, and that Washington commanded our armies, and that Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Va., a society was formed that denounced the Constitution because it recognized slavery—like some of our modern sisters

who ignore the sacred word because of the fiat of the Almighty, "Unto the woman he said: Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

But notwithstanding the warning notes sounded by our illustrious Washington, in less than half a century sectional parties began to form. The South continued agricultural and the North added to its commerce manufactures. The cotton States exported their principal staple, and wanted imports with revenue duties; the North, being stronger, enacted a protective tariff. One of the Southern States passed an ordinance nullifying the laws of the United States, and refused to pay duties on imports, but the firmness of President Jackson, and the conciliatory measures of Henry Clay, forced her to repeal that ordinance before others joined her, and thus was suppressed without bloodshed the first attempt at secession, but not long afterward a cloud arose in the east, at first "not bigger than a man's hand," but finally overshadowed the whole Union, and deluged the land, not with water but with blood.

The first great contention was for the Territories—whether they should become slave or free States. The passions of both sections became inflamed, and where passion prevails reason loses its sway; man approaches nearer the lower order of animals, and recedes farther and farther from the image of the Creator. The North would never have consented to have enacted a law to make compensation for emancipation; nor would the South have accepted the offer. Yet the abolishment of slavery cost the United States more than \$1,000 for every man, woman and child emancipated.

But this was the least of its evils; homes were left desolate all over the land. "And the sins of the fathers were visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." One great question was settled by the war, a question of great interest to the whole Union, and especially to the citizens of Washington city—the right of a State to secede. There is nothing in the Constitution which either in word, inference, or by idea, admits of any such right; to have conceded such would have been national suicide. Yet the Southern States had always contended for this among other State rights. The arbitrament of the sword has settled that question, and the Union now rests on a firmer basis than ever. The tendency of parties is to run into extremes. The South made the grave error of claiming the right of secession. The dominant party of to-day makes a like great error in ignoring State rights. Ours is a government of limited powers specifically defined by the Constitution, and all powers not granted are reserved to the States and the people. It is to be regretted that by a late amendment the right to regulate suffrage by each State (which originally existed) was in an important exception denied. The evil effects of that amendment have been experienced in a continual sectional irritation, although slavery has been abolished.

The past cannot be recalled, but all good citizens will unite in devising some means to make the future harmonious, either by an educational or some other qualification as a prerequisite to suffrage. The powers granted the United States were sufficient to carry the nation through two foreign and one civil war. A government

by the people has been found by experience to be the strongest government in the world. Our Congress, with its limited powers, is preferable to the parliament of Great Britain, exercising power at the present time in upholding an oppressive landed aristocracy and grinding the faces of the poor tenants. It is also preferable to the French legislature, representing one great state and muzzling the press, and interfering with religious liberty and the rights of conscience. "E pluribus unum" has been our motto, and may it be so forever.

Each State harmoniously revolves in its own orbit. Our sun, the Congress of the United States, is the grand centre around which each revolves. Union without centralization is the most perfect union. Washington and the framers of the Constitution and the people of that day so decided. After the adoption of the Constitution the District of Columbia was selected as the seat of government, and it is the only place where Congress has exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, excepting forts, magazines, arsenals, dockyards, and other needful buildings. The plan of the city of Washington was laid out on a magnificent scale, with a wise foresight of its future greatness. Its broad streets and noble avenues differ greatly from the contracted spaces of older cities; its reservations, its circles, its triangles, made by the intersection of streets with avenues, are lungs through which a free people breathe.

Washington, up to the war with Great Britain, was largely dependent on Georgetown, its elder sister, whence it obtained all its supplies. Washington belles did all their shopping there. The old Union (now the

West End Hotel) was the great hotel of the District; it was thronged with members of Congress and other guests; its stables were filled with the best horses, for in those primitive days equestrianism was the rule and vehicles the exception. The great statesman of Kentucky rode on horseback to Washington. Henry Clay, who "would rather be right than President," was among the distinguished guests who boarded at the Union Hotel.

Even in my boyhood I remember that not a watermelon, or a sweet potato, or an oyster, a shad, or a herring, were landed at Washington. Our harbor was crowded with pungies and oyster-boats, from whence Washington was supplied. The wholesale grocers of Georgetown supplied nearly all the retail grocers of Washington; but this has changed, and the reverse is the case.

Georgetown has her history; she was created a town in 1751, and chartered as a city in 1789. The same year George Washington was inaugurated our first President. Georgetown had a large commerce coastwise, and also traded with the West Indies, Europe, and the East Indies. All this has now ceased except the coastwise trade, which is quite extensive, its principal exports being coal, flour and grain. Among her merchants were Elisha Riggs, since of New York, now deceased, and George Peabody, since of London, also deceased, who left his memorial, the "Peabody Library." Edward M. Linthicum, one of her prominent merchants, left his memorial, the "Linthicum Institute." Among her citizens was the author of "The Star Spangled Banner," afterwards District Attorney.

Among those born in Georgetown were George W. Riggs, W. W. Corcoran, now of Washington, and Robt. Ould, now of Richmond, Va.

Washington increased. Georgetown remained stationary for thirty years. The trade from Washington, which helped to enrich Georgetown, almost entirely ceased. During these changes there was jealousy between the two sisters, and the younger triumphed over the elder, no uncommon thing in these days, as every daughter has not a Laban for her father.

Georgetown has been celebrated for her beautiful heights and her more beautiful women. The Count Bodisco, minister from Russia, took from among her fairest daughters his bride.

“E’en the slight harebell raised its head
Elastic from her airy tread.”

There are still plenty of fair young maidens left, who, like Milton’s Eve,

“Would be wooed and not unsought be won.”

As time progressed the jealousy between the two cities increased, and even the boys entertained it. Many a stone battle has been fought at the Bridge street bridge, and, like another “Lodi,” was hotly contested, with this difference, that sometimes one and sometimes the other was compelled to retreat.

“Lands which a narrow creek divide,
Which else like kindred drops had mingled into one.”

Among the principal points of contention was the construction of the Long Bridge in 1807. Georgetown protested and held indignation meetings, and continued to protest, until 1861, when military necessity

required the use of the bridge. What is not singular in the mutations of time, Washington is now protesting against the Long Bridge. "Nemesis has indeed wings, but does not always use them; but the slower her foot, the harder is her hand."

Georgetown has always been celebrated for her literary institutions; among these "The College," "The Ladies' Academy," and Miss English's Seminary. In the latter was educated Miss Jessie Benton, afterward the wife of J. C. Fremont, the first Republican candidate for the Presidency. But Providence postponed the election of a Republican President four years, and gave us the good and great Abraham Lincoln, the martyr President, the second Washington.

Georgetown still sustains her high literary reputation. The Georgetown College continues, enlarged and improved. The Ladies' Academy flourishes more than ever, and the Collegiate Institute for young ladies conducted by Miss Stephenson are a credit to our city. Excuse these reminiscences of the town in which I was born and have lived for nearly two-thirds of a century; I love her as a Swiss loves his native hills.

My first memories of Washington city are in the first ward; north of Pennsylvania avenue and adjoining Georgetown; of clay hills and hollows, with here and there a shanty, disfiguring any landscape; south of Pennsylvania avenue, extensive cow-pastures; east of Holmead's burying-ground the slashes, an undergrowth of wood, with cowpaths in which to wander; Pennsylvania avenue, with its row of Lombardy poplars, from the Capitol to the Marsh or Center market.

Washington was called "the city of magnificent distances." Until about ten years since it was a scattered city, with its public buildings like exotics in its midst.

There was an Alexander the Great, and there was another Alexander, the genius of the Board of Public Works. He spread his magic wand, and lo! all was changed—

"The desert blossomed as a rose."

The streets and avenues of the city were parked, graded and sewered, under a comprehensive system. Washington became a city worthy of the name of George Washington. But for the untiring efforts of Alexander R. Shepherd, Reavis might have found "a fulcrum on which to rest his lever," and the Capitol might have been removed. If that ever occurs another Gibbon will write the decline and fall of the United States of America. All honor to Alexander R. Shepherd. The citizens of the District and the whole nation owe him a debt of gratitude. Georgetown and Washington are now one city. A rose would not lose its fragrance by a change of name; so our romantic heights and our society will not change. The witty Donn Piatt called us the "aristocratic cemetery." We are not ashamed of the name. Oak Hill, with its grand scenery unsurpassed by any necropolis in the Union, is among the many evidences of the liberality of W. W. Corcoran.

Our city will add to the area and increase the population of Washington. The time is coming, and some of our grandchildren will live to see it, when the limits of the national metropolis will include nearly the whole county. Her population will exceed half a million;

and the Potomac flats filled, her wharves, extending from the Aqueduct Bridge to the Navy Yard, will be lined with river and sea-going vessels. We have lived in an eventful and progressive age. In our youth there was but one steamboat, the "Surprise," making two trips daily to Alexandria from Georgetown, and the old steamboat "Columbia," still in existence, making a weekly trip to the Potomac landings, Baltimore and return. Steamboats were in their infancy; sea-going boats unknown. The telegraph, railroads, and telephones did not exist in the wildest imaginations. Even the little friction-match was not in use, and many a person has cut his knuckles on a cold morning in igniting tinder with a flint and steel, and using a brimstone match. Even anthracite coal was not in use. Greater progress has been made in mechanical and useful arts in the present century than was made in half a dozen centuries preceding this. How much more the finite mind can accomplish it is impossible to foretell.

But, gentlemen, I weary you with my lucubrations. Old men are garrulous, and I conclude with again reminding you of the virtues of Washington, acknowledged by the whole civilized world. Let us imitate his character, his unselfish patriotism. We are old men, and when we come to die, while we will not be mourned by an entire people, we will be mourned by our relatives, our friends, and by every member of the Oldest Inhabitants Association.

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